

CAMEROON: TIER 2 WATCH LIST

Cameroon is a source, transit, and destination country for women and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking and a source country for men in forced labor. Child traffickers often use the promise of education or a better life in the city to convince rural parents to give their children over to an intermediary, who then exploits the children in sex trafficking or forced labor. Child traffickers increasingly resort to kidnapping victims, as heightened public awareness of trafficking has led parents to be less willing to give their children to these intermediaries. Homeless children and orphans are especially vulnerable to trafficking. Teenagers and adolescents from economically disadvantaged families are often lured to cities by the prospect of employment but are subjected to labor or sex trafficking. Cameroonian children are exploited in domestic service, restaurants, begging or vending on streets and highways, artisanal gold mining, gravel quarries, fishing, animal breeding, and agriculture (on onion, cotton, tea and cocoa plantations), as well as in urban transportation assisting bus drivers and construction as errand boys, laborers, or night watchmen. Children are subjected to sex trafficking within the country. Reports document hereditary slavery in northern chiefdoms. Children from neighboring countries are exploited in spare parts shops or by herders in northern Cameroon, and transit the country en route to Gabon and Equatorial Guinea.

Cameroonian women and men are lured to Europe and other regions by fraudulent Internet marriage proposals or offers of well-paying jobs, and subsequently become victims of forced prostitution or forced labor, especially in domestic servitude. Cameroonians are exploited in forced labor and sex trafficking in several Middle Eastern countries, Haiti, the United States, and multiple African countries. Increasing numbers of Cameroonian women are exploited in domestic servitude in Kuwait. Cameroonians are increasingly acting as intermediaries in subjecting other Cameroonians to trafficking in foreign countries. These perpetrators are often locals working for foreign recruitment agencies in Cameroon or former trafficking victims residing in destination countries. Anecdotal evidence indicates increasing numbers of Cameroonians are operating trafficking networks in Morocco that force women into prostitution. Cameroonian women also transit Morocco en route to Europe, where they are often forced into prostitution by European trafficking networks.

Adults and children from Central African Republic (CAR) and Nigeria are lured to Cameroon by the prospect of better employment opportunities and enhanced livelihoods but are subsequently subjected to labor trafficking. Refugees from CAR and Nigeria, as well as displaced Cameroonians fleeing insecurity in border areas, are more vulnerable to human trafficking in Cameroon, especially in urban areas. Nigerian traffickers increasingly bring Nigerian children to major Cameroonian cities for forced labor in spare parts shops. Media and international observers reported Cameroon was a destination for Nigerian women and girls used as forced suicide bombers and boys used as child soldiers by the terrorist organization Boko Haram during the reporting period. There are reports Cameroonian officials were complicit in human trafficking offenses.

The Government of Cameroon does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. During the reporting period, two regional anti-trafficking taskforces investigated some trafficking offenses and conducted awareness-raising activities. Despite these measures, the government did not demonstrate overall increasing anti-trafficking efforts compared to the previous reporting period; therefore, Cameroon is placed on Tier 2 Watch List. The government recorded fewer trafficking investigations and convictions than the previous year and did not provide sufficient funding or resources to the anti-trafficking taskforces or inter-ministerial anti-trafficking committee, which severely hampered their ability to fulfill their mandates. The government did not adhere to its own sentencing requirements, issuing suspended sentences for trafficking crimes or allowing settlements out of court. It did not train or provide support for anti-trafficking training for its law enforcement officials. The government did not provide any repatriation assistance or victim services to dozens of Cameroonian trafficking victims identified abroad.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CAMEROON:

Finalize and enact legislation to conform the definitions of human trafficking with international law and to address the lack of victim protection measures provided under current law; increase efforts to prosecute and convict traffickers for the full spectrum of trafficking crimes, including government officials complicit in trafficking-related offenses; expand training for police, labor inspectors, judges, lawyers, and social workers on the anti-trafficking law and victim-centered

investigations; issue travel documents, including laissez-passer cards, to Cameroonian trafficking victims abroad to enable them to return home; provide repatriation assistance and victim services to Cameroonian trafficking victims identified abroad, and increase services for adult trafficking victims; train government officials and NGOs on the standardized procedures for referring trafficking victims to government and NGO services; investigate allegations of fraudulent labor recruiters and agencies suspected of participating in human trafficking of Cameroonians abroad and prosecute if complicit in trafficking; provide funding, material resources, and training on trafficking investigations to the inter-ministerial anti-trafficking committee and regional anti-trafficking taskforces, and establish taskforces in the remaining seven regions; provide pre-departure information to citizens on their rights as foreign workers and sources of assistance while abroad; take action to regulate unlicensed recruiters and intermediaries, and monitor recruitment signs posted in rural areas; expand funding to Cameroonian embassies to better assist trafficking victims abroad; dedicate resources to improve data collection on victim identification and law enforcement efforts; and investigate cases of hereditary slavery in the northern regions.

PROSECUTION

The government decreased law enforcement efforts. In its 2011 anti-trafficking law, the definition of “trafficking in persons” requires movement and does not define “exploitation.” The definition of “slavery in persons” does not require movement and criminalizes most forms of human trafficking. However, crimes of “slavery in persons” against a child younger than 18 years require the use of threat, fraud, deception, force, or other forms of coercion to be considered sex trafficking, which is contrary to international law where such means are not required. Section 4 of the law prescribes penalties of 10 to 20 years’ imprisonment and a fine of 50,000 to one million CFA francs (FCFA) (\$83-\$1,660) for trafficking and “slavery in persons,” which are sufficiently stringent and commensurate with penalties prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. Section 5 prescribes penalties ranging from 15 to 20 years’ imprisonment and a fine of 100,000 to one million FCFA (\$166 - \$1,660) if the trafficking victim is 15 years old or younger, if a weapon is used, or if the victim sustains serious injuries as a result of being subjected to trafficking. Section 3 prescribes penalties for debt bondage ranging from five to 10 years’ imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 to 1,000,000 FCFA (\$17-

\$1,660). These penalties are also sufficiently stringent. Draft legislation to improve the 2011 law to address victim and witness protection and to address definitional inconsistencies with international law, which was drafted in 2012 in collaboration with the government, an NGO, and national and international experts, remained pending for the fourth consecutive year.

The government did not collect anti-trafficking law enforcement data from eight of its 10 regions, resulting in unreliable and incomplete statistics on victim identification and law enforcement efforts. Information available from the Northwest and Southwest regions indicated the government initiated 17 trafficking investigations, prosecuted 20 defendants, and convicted two traffickers, all for labor trafficking. This is a decrease from 25 investigations and eight convictions, but an increase from 11 prosecutions the previous reporting period. The two convicted traffickers received suspended sentences and paid fines of 60,000 FCFA (\$100) each; while all traffickers convicted during the previous reporting period faced jail time, penalties applied in 2015 were far below the minimum mandated by the 2011 law, reportedly because the victims' families were paid by the defendants and refused to cooperate with the judiciary. These punishments were not commensurate with the seriousness of the crime, allowed the traffickers to avoid imprisonment, and served as an ineffective deterrent to the commission of trafficking offenses. For the second year, prosecutions against at least three alleged traffickers and investigations of 10 additional cases remained ongoing, and the 2013 conviction of a child trafficker remained under appeal. Officials indicated that due to the lack of training for law enforcement and judicial staff, some trafficking offenses may have been tried as child abuse or kidnapping, which carry lesser penalties.

Although law enforcement, judicial personnel, and other relevant officials lacked training in distinguishing human trafficking from other crimes, the government did not directly provide anti-trafficking training or grant in-kind support for trainings by other organizations. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking offenses; however, there were indications that official complicity occurred. For example, authorities did not investigate a judicial official after a missing girl was discovered in domestic servitude in his home, reportedly because he agreed to pay for several years of the girl's education as compensation. Despite

the identification of several dozen Cameroonian trafficking victims abroad, including many in Kuwait, the government did not initiate investigations of labor recruitment agencies within Cameroon or cooperate with foreign governments on transnational trafficking investigations.

PROTECTION

The government maintained its modest internal victim identification and protection efforts, but made inadequate efforts to identify or assist Cameroonians exploited abroad. Limited information available from two of the country's 10 regions indicated the government identified 13 labor trafficking victims, including four children—a decrease from 17 victims identified the previous reporting period. The government provided all 13 victims with services, including transportation, temporary accommodation, and medical care. NGOs identified several dozen cases of Cameroonians subjected to labor trafficking abroad during the reporting period, yet there is no evidence the government provided victim assistance, including funds for repatriation. There were reports Cameroonian trafficking victims abroad approached a Cameroonian embassy for assistance, but the embassy did not help initiate investigations for trafficking offenses, provide or refer victims to protective services, or support repatriation. However, the government did not produce comprehensive statistics on the number of trafficking victims identified or the services these victims received, resulting in unreliable and incomplete statistics on victim identification and law enforcement efforts. The government continued to offer direct assistance to vulnerable children and child victims of crimes such as trafficking, including temporary shelter, medical and psychological services, and reintegration support through care facilities in several cities. Government shelters were available for women victims; however, there was no evidence any victims used the shelters during the reporting period. NGOs reported identifying at least 20 Cameroonian labor trafficking victims; NGOs provided the majority of in-country services to these victims, as well as victims identified by the government.

There is no evidence the government made efforts to encourage victims to participate in investigations or legal proceedings against their traffickers. It is unclear whether the government provided counseling, legal support, or any other assistance to victims during court proceedings. Victims may file suits or seek legal action against traffickers, and family members may also bring civil suits against

traffickers on behalf of children. At least 20 victims filed restitution suits against traffickers during the reporting period; the cases were ongoing at the end of the reporting period. The government could grant temporary residency status to foreign victims who, if deported, may face hardship or retribution; however, it did not report use of this accommodation during the year. There were no reports the government punished trafficking victims for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being subjected to trafficking. However, due to a lack of formal victim identification procedures during the reporting period, some victims may have remained unidentified in the law enforcement system. During the reporting period, the government deported several thousand undocumented Nigerian refugees without screening for indicators of trafficking.

PREVENTION

The government maintained prevention efforts, but its inadequate provision of resources to national and regional coordinating bodies stymied coordination on anti-trafficking initiatives. The inter-ministerial committee met on an ad hoc basis and made modest efforts to implement its 2014-2019 anti-trafficking national action plan by offering education and psycho-social care to street children vulnerable to trafficking and conducting awareness campaigns through its regional taskforces. The Ministry of Social Affairs continued to assist street children vulnerable to trafficking by placing 20 children in government-sponsored shelters that offered healthcare, education, and psycho-social services. Anecdotal reports suggest border police, especially those at the Nigerian and CAR borders, were more aware of trafficking and required parental authorizations for children traveling without their parents. The anti-trafficking regional taskforces' effectiveness decreased due to a severe lack of resources and clear mandates, and the government did not establish new taskforces in the remaining regions; it had established two new taskforces in the previous reporting period. The Northwest and Southwest taskforces, comprised of representatives from social welfare agencies, police, gendarmerie, magistrates, and NGOs, coordinated the response to trafficking cases and conducted awareness campaigns on the radio and through community watch groups; however, they lacked the resources and training necessary to adequately fulfill their mandates.

Although officials and NGOs identified several dozen Cameroonian trafficking victims in Europe and the Middle East, some of whom had been recruited and defrauded by unlicensed Cameroonian middlemen, the government did not attempt to proactively regulate such recruiters or initiate investigations of suspicious recruitment practices as cases arose during the year. To reduce the demand for commercial sex acts with children, the government continued its public awareness campaign against child sexual exploitation; however, it did not make efforts to reduce the demand for forced labor or for commercial sex acts with adults. The government provided briefings on international humanitarian law and the requirements governing international peacekeeping missions to members of the Cameroonian armed forces prior to their deployment abroad on such missions; it is unclear whether these trainings included anti-trafficking modules. There were allegations Cameroonian peacekeepers deployed to the UN mission in CAR sexually exploited civilians during the reporting period; the investigations were ongoing at the end of the reporting period. The government reported providing anti-trafficking training for its diplomatic personnel.